



# HISTORICAL REVIEW

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1922 FIRE DEVASTATED 32 BLOCKS OF DOWNTOWN ASTORIA, AND FOR A TIME THREATENED RESIDENTIAL AREA AS WELL. STORY, MORE PICTURES ON PAGES 1 AND 2. (Cover photo courtesy Clatsop County Museum)

# HISTORICAL REVIEW

Spring 1987

Page 1



ALL THAT REMAINS OF THE WEINHARD ASTORIA IS THE ARCH OVER WHAT USED TO BE THE MAIN ENTRANCE. The column is now in the City Park. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)



ANOTHER ANGLE SHOWING RUBBLE AFTER FIRE, WHICH DESTROYED 32 BLOCKS OF THE BUSINESS DISTRICT. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)



LOOKING DOWN 14TH STREET AT SMOLDERING RUINS. Astoria Drug Store is on the right. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)



NOT MUCH LEFT TO GUARD AT THE FIRST NATIONAL BANK, BUT THERE WERE ARMED PATROLS TO PREVENT LOOTING ANYWAY. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)

## December 8, 1922, a Date to Remember

Because of the attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7th is a significant date to most Americans. Older Astorians have the same feeling about December 8th. It was on that date in 1922, that downtown Astoria was destroyed by fire.

While the source of the fire has never been proven for certain, there are theories. One expert said that it started in a restaurant on Commercial Street, while some fire officials felt at the time that the fire had been set in multiple locations. Neither theory has been proven, and the debate continues to this day.

What is known for sure, is

that the fire started at about 2 A.M. in the basement of a building on Commercial Street between 11th and 12th. Once started, the fire was quickly carried from one building to another by a brisk wind.

The fire raged with such intensity that the only way to stop it was by dynamiting many of the buildings in its path. That is why the destruction was so complete in some pictures. In all, 32 blocks of the business district were wiped out, at an estimated loss of \$15 million.

But almost before the smoke had cleared, Astoria was

can't on page 2

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THE EXTENT OF THE DEVASTATION MAY BE SEEN IN THIS PHOTO, WHICH LOOKS TOWARDS THE WATER, FROM THE HILLSIDE. (Courtesy Clatsop County Historical Society)



A SOLDIER MARCHES BETWEEN THE WEINHARD HOTEL AND ASTORIA NATIONAL BANK. (Courtesy Ore. State Hist. Soc.)



THE RUINS OF DOZENS OF BUSINESSES, LOOKING WEST ON COMMERCIAL STREET. (Courtesy Ore. State Historical Society)



IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE FIRE, ALL CARS WERE INSPECTED, NAMES TAKEN AND A PASS REQUIRED TO GET OUT. (Courtesy Ore. State Historical Society)



THE RIVIERA THEATER, UNDER CONSTRUCTION IN 1923. One of many businesses that sprang from the ashes of the Great Fire. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)

### Astoria Fire

cont'd from page 1

making plans to rebuild. A check today of the area between 8th and 17th, from the railroad tracks to Exchange will show several buildings built in 1923, just months after the fire.



A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT AMID THE RUINS. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)



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LIFESAVING CREW BATTLES THE SURF TO REACH THOSE ABOARD. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)



THE FRENCH SHIP "ALICE" RAN AGROUND OFF OCEAN PARK IN 1910. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)

## First Lifesaving Efforts

Many shipwrecks are recorded along the stretch of coast surrounding the Columbia River outlet, and in the early days there was very little that could be done to help from shore.

The mouth of the Columbia offers particularly dangerous conditions, and it was here that the "Bark Industry" was sunk in 1865. Although she went down in sight of the lighthouse at Cape Disappointment, lighthouse keeper Joel Munson had no means of rescue, and 17 lives were lost.

Tragically as the incident was, it did have one positive result;

an old metallic boat washed ashore along with the other wreckage, and Munson salvaged it and made plans to put it to use for rescue work.

The inspired Munson convinced the Lighthouse Department to build a shelter for the boat, which was to be manned by volunteers. Within a year, a government lifesaving station was established, and the boat and facilities were turned over to them.

Many lives were saved in those first few years of the rescue service that was the forerunner of the U.S. Coast Guard.

## Buried Treasure

There is an Indian legend that a sailing ship put ashore a crew that carried a box to Neahkahnie Mountain, where it was buried. Two swords were placed in the form of a cross and buried with it.



SILHOUETTE OF A SAILING SHIP, OF THE TYPE THAT USED TO VISIT ASTORIA BY THE HUNDREDS. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)

Over the years, many people have hunted for the gold, all without success. Some of the treasure hunters ran into trouble along the way, as the treasure was buried by the mysterious crew, it awaits the adventuresome person who can figure out where to look for it.

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KAST'S DOWNTOWN STUDIO, USED DURING THE 40'S IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE STATION'S YOUNGS BAY FACILITY.  
(Courtesy KAST Radio)



KAST RADIO WAS MANAGED BY ROBERT HOLMES FOR 14 YEARS. (Photo courtesy KAST Radio)

## Robert Holmes: From Radio Manager to Governor

Robert Holmes of Gearhart overcame the odds to build a successful career, first in broadcasting, then in politics.

Holmes came to Portland from Rochester, New York, in 1925. There he worked on the advertising staff of the Oregon Journal from 1926 to 1928, and the Oregonian in 1930. During that period, he was also a student at the University of Oregon.

After graduation in 1932, the future governor worked in sales promotion for the Portland Gas and Coke Company. He then joined Bio-Products Inc., in Astoria, in a similar capacity.

Holmes lived in Gearhart, and in 1941 began his political career, when he was elected to the Gearhart school board.

It was in 1943 that Holmes entered the broadcasting field, when he was named manager of radio station KAST. He ran the station until 1957.

After two terms in the Oregon State Senate, Holmes became a darkhorse candidate to succeed Governor Paul Patterson, who died on January 31, 1956.

Elmo Smith, the Republican president of the Senate, was installed to serve until the general election of that year. Smith was expected to be an easy winner, partly because of the visibility he gained as interim Governor, and partly because his Democratic opponent, Holmes, was from a small town and was not well known statewide.

But when the votes were counted in November, it was Holmes by the narrow margin of 362,288 to 356,323 for Smith.

Throughout the rest of his illustrious career, Robert Holmes maintained his home in Gearhart. He died of lung cancer in 1976.



FORMER GOVERNOR ROBERT HOLMES, SHOWN AT KAST RADIO. He managed the station from 1943 to 1957, when he became Governor of Oregon. (Courtesy KAST Radio)



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**WAITING FOR THE A & C RR, THE FIRST TRAIN TO PORTLAND.** (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)



**SP&S RR CREW POSES NEAR HOLLADAY, AS SEASIDE WAS KNOWN IN THE EARLY DAYS.** (Photo courtesy Clatsop County Museum)



**ON THE DOCK AT ILWACO, WAITING FOR THE T.J. POTTER.** (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)

### Early Travel to Seaside Terrible

In the early 1900's, train service was vital for travel between Seaside and Astoria. During the winter, about the only way to travel between the two cities was by train, or by way of a railroad handcar.

Service improved somewhat in 1923, when the Spokane, Portland, and Seattle Railroad

outfitted a truck with railway wheels, and began making two trips a day between the two cities.

The problem was pretty well solved with the building of a hard surfaced road a few years later, which made it possible to drive an automobile between the two cities.

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### Aerobic Vacuum Cleaner

The bellows was used to blow air into fireplaces and furnaces for hundreds of years. At about the turn of the century, it was discovered that the bellows could be used to suck air in as well as blow it out. Along with the air came dust, dirt and grime. That was the principle behind the design of the pre-electric vacuum



**RARE PHOTO OF OPERATING ROOM OF HOSPITAL IN 1910.** Note lack of gloves and masks. (Courtesy Lewis County Museum)

cleaners.

The problem was that it took two people to operate such a vacuum cleaner effectively. One person would pump the bellows while the other held the hose in the right position to suck up dirt.

In 1912, Alexander Jack came up with a solution. By attaching bellows to the oper-

ators feet, one person could do the job alone. As the house-keeper walked around the room, she pumped the bellows and created enough suction to clean it.

Fortunately for the women who had to use them, the introduction of electrically powered vacuums soon made these torture devices obsolete.



GEARHART'S PLANK ROAD AND SIDEWALK. WALKING WAS VERY POPULAR AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)



THE BOARDWALK (MADE OF BOARDS, OF COURSE) AT CHINOOK, WASHINGTON, IN 1903. (Courtesy Clatsop Museum)



A CROWD GATHERS "ROUND" IN THIS PHOTO OF THE PORTLAND HOTEL IN LONG BEACH, WASHINGTON. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)



PACIFIC AVENUE IN LONG BEACH, WA., CROWDED WITH PEOPLE AND CARS IN THIS EARLY PHOTO. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)

## Early Logging

The earliest recorded logging began in the area as an logging activity in Clatsop County. In those early days, to transport the cut timber. County was the cutting of trees logging was extremely dangerous. One ingenious method involved by the Lewis and Clark expedition and milling was difficult. To falling some trees lengthwise, for use in the building of keep hauling distances to a down a hill, and the rest were minimum, the mill was usually felled across them and rolled to the bottom of the hill.

About 50 years later, located in the logging area.

Several methods were used to transport the cut timber. One ingenious method involved by the Lewis and Clark expedition and milling was difficult. To falling some trees lengthwise, for use in the building of keep hauling distances to a down a hill, and the rest were minimum, the mill was usually felled across them and rolled to the bottom of the hill.

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## Ask Grandma



### Modern Advice From Days Gone By

Dear Arabella:

Disappointing though it may be to you, I must tell you that no **gentleman** driving alone with a lady should sit beside her unless he is her husband, father, brother or son. Even an affianced lover should remember this rule of etiquette.

Be patient, my dear, and pursue your goal in a ladylike way so you may never have to answer to a besmirched reputation. •••

Dear Grandma:

I am sixteen years old and have this craving for sassafras tea. My mom gives it to me every spring so as to thin my blood, but after my blood is

thin I still want some and she says it's no good for me then. Besides, she uses all the roots and bark up so I can't even sneak any. Does anybody else get this hankering, and what can I do about it? Signed-Freddie

Dear Freddie:

Yes, there are others with your problem. I am afraid you are addicted to sassafras tea, and your mother is right about not drinking any more after your blood is thinned. However, there is an acceptable substitute which I am sure will erase the craving you have for the tea:

#### CRUST COFFEE

Toast some bread very brown and pour some boiling water on it. Let stand a few minutes, then strain to get the "coffee". A little cream and sugar may be used, if you wish.

Please assure your mother, dear, that this will not be harmful to you in any way and there is very little chance the you will ever become addicted to it.

•••

To My Readers:

I have received many letters about tobacco smoking, and rather than answer each

individually, I am reprinting the following dissertation of a Dr. Murphy, written in 1900:

"I consider tobacco smoking one of the most injurious and deadly habits a boy or young man can indulge in. It contracts the chest and weakens the lungs, thus pre-disposing to consumption. It impairs the stomach, producing indigestion. It debilitates the brain and nervous system, inducing epileptic fits and nervous depression. It stunts the growth and is one cause of the current race of pygmies. It makes the young lazy and disinclined to work. It is one of the greatest curses today."

I have received nearly as many letters from concerned mothers regarding the chewing of spruce and other gums. According to the Encyclopedia of Health and Home, this habit is also a serious health hazard. It is not only filthy and unpleasant, but it is also destructive, and parents cannot be too careful to guard their children against it. If the chewer spits the saliva from his mouth, it can weaken and exhaust his whole system, for the saliva contains important properties which are all essential. •••

Dear Grandma:

My mother and I are having a terrible disagreement about where I should sit when I go for a drive with my gentleman friend. She thinks I should sit in the back and I feel that is unnecessary since we almost have an understanding. Besides, he only has one lap robe.

My mother has agreed to abide by whatever you say, so please hurry and answer. Signed-Arabella



SHERIFF OLE MELSON (IN SUIT) AND HIS MEN POSE BY ILLEGAL STILL DURING PROHIBITION. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)



JAILED FOR MAKING MOONSHINE WERE BEN JARRELL (left) and Bill Clark. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)



BILL THOMPSON POSES BY A VINE MAPLE TREE. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)

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FARMING WAS NOT HIGH TECH IN THE EARLY YEARS. James Gallagher was a Clatsop County farmer in 1895. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)

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THE MOST FAMOUS SHIP IN NAVAL HISTORY, "OLD IRONSIDES" DURING 1933 VISIT TO ASTORIA. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)



"U.S.S. CONSTITUTION," DOCKSIDE AT ASTORIA. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)

### "Old Ironsides"

The U.S.S. Constitution, the most famous ship in U.S. Naval history, has been rebuilt so many times that only a small percentage of the original material remains.

The 44-gun frigate was launched October 21, 1797. Among the many battles she participated in was the bombardment of Tripoli in 1804.

She is best known by her

nickname, which she earned during a battle in the war of 1812. Under Captain Isaac Hull, she destroyed the British frigate "Guerriere." When a shot from the British ship fell

## Early Days of Gimre's Shoes

By Kermit Gimre

My father, Sven Gimre, was an immigrant from his native Norway nearly 100 years ago. In 1889, he arrived in Astoria penniless, with only the clothes on his back. In addition, he was in debt to his brother, Peter Anders Gimre, for approximately \$200.00 for his steamship and railway fare to Astoria. Peter had arrived about 3 years earlier, and was working in a local sawmill, where he helped my father obtain his first work.

In his native Norway, Sven had gone to trade school at the age of 14, where he spent 3 years learning how to make shoes by hand. After a short time working in the sawmill, my father opened a small shoe shop on Bond Street, between 11th and 12th. The year was 1892, and Dad was 24 years old and in business for himself!

Having no money to buy shoes for resale, for years he simply repaired shoes and made custom shoes for his growing clientele.

About this time, Mr. T. Bergmann opened a small shoe factory in Portland, and he approached my father, offering him 36 pairs of factory made shoes on credit, to be paid for as sold. Bergmann shoes and loggers later became nationally known for their fine fit and quality, and many an Astorian wore them in those early days. It wasn't long before Gimre's became one of the leading shoe stores in Astoria.

I recall several interesting stories from those early days. For instance, Father had a trap door in the rear of the store. On a quiet day, he would simply open the door, drop his fish line, and in a few minutes had fish for dinner.

Speaking of food, Father used to tell about the saloon next door to his store, where they served a wonderful lunch for ten cents, including soup, sandwiches and beverage. The saloons had to do something to compete, because there were approximately 50 in the downtown area. Most were in corner locations, and Gimre's was one of the few retail businesses on a street corner.

In the old days, merchandise was stacked all the way to the ceiling along the walls. There were ladders on wheels, about twenty feet long, attached to the walls. It was a thrill to get a good start and scoot the entire length of the store, holding on to the



SVEN GIMRE IN THE DOORWAY OF HIS SHOE SHOP IN THE EARLY 1890'S.

ladder for dear life. I was now six years old, and the year was 1922. It was December, the year of the fire. Father, along with every other merchant in downtown Astoria, lost everything in one devastating day.

In January, 1923, Gimre's moved into a temporary location on 13th, next door to Peter Closovich's Astoria Stationary. By early 1924, Father moved into a brand new building at 239 14th St., which remains the location of Gimre's Shoes to this day.

Several years ago, the Oregon Historical Society honored Gimre's as the oldest family shoe store in Oregon still under the same family ownership. The store was started by my father Sven Anders Gimre, then operated for many years by my brother Sven, Jr. and myself. Sven has retired, and now the third generation is taking over; Peter Anders Gimre and Jon Kermit Gimre, who operates the new branch store in Hillsboro. I am now semi-retired, and the Astoria store is under supervision of Peter, and co-managed by Virgil Mills, who has been with Gimre's for the past twenty years.



KERMIT AND SVEN JR. PLAY IN SEASIDE AS CHILDREN, WHILE SVEN SR. LOOKS ON. (Photos courtesy K. Gimre)



THE ASTORIA HOTEL IN 1899. Man driving buggy is identified as Fritz Voss, others unidentified. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)



ASTORIA'S OWL DRUG IN 1926. Sign on counter advertises Mutual Ice Cream. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)



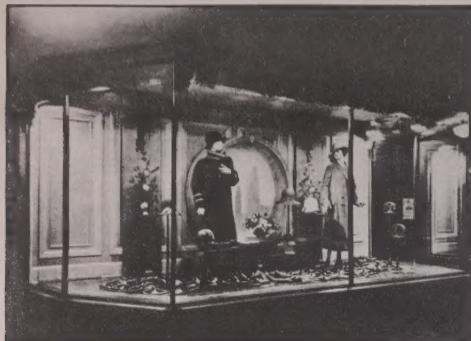
READY FOR BUSINESS, AT THE A.V. ALLEN STORE IN 1900. The store was located at 10th and Commercial in Astoria. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)



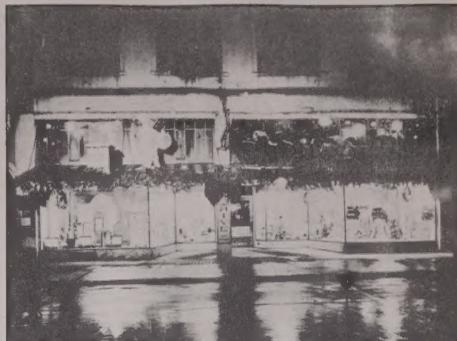
SHOES FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY  
239 14th St., Astoria



YOUNCE TINNING AND PLUMBING WAS LOCATED ON BOND STREET. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)



THE LATEST FASHIONS ARE DISPLAYED IN THE WINDOW OF BEEHIVE'S NEW STORE, A COUPLE YEARS AFTER THE OLD ONE WAS DESTROYED IN THE 1922 FIRE. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)



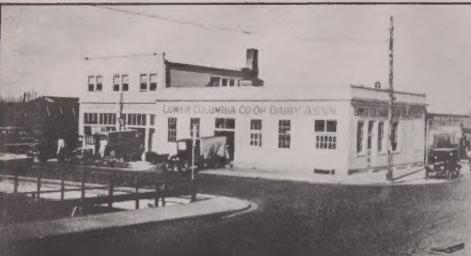
THE BEEHIVE STORE, DECORATED FOR CHRISTMAS IN 1918. The store burned to the ground in 1922, but was rebuilt. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)



HERE KITTY, KITTY. Soft-hearted hunter brought these tikes home with him. No word on what happened to the mother, but note gun leaning against stump. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)



LARGE CROWD GATHERS AT THE GEARHART HOTEL FOR THIS 1892 PICTURE. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)



LOADING UP WITH MOO JUICE AT THE LOWER COLUMBIA DAIRY CO-OP. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)



ONE OF THE MANY EARLY AUTO PARKS THAT OFFERED PRIMITIVE ACCOMODATIONS. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)

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MARY GERRITSE in 1945.  
(Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)

## Neither Rain Nor High Surf

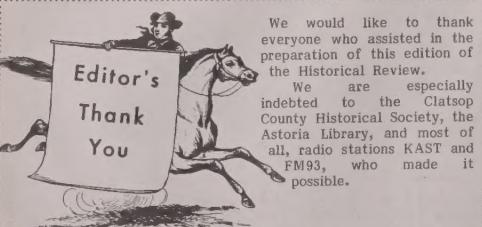
The Pony Express mail service operated in the United States from 1839 to 1861. But nearly 50 years after that, Mary Gerritse was riding a horse to deliver mail to the small towns south of Seaside.

Spunky Mary packed the mail on horseback from 1897 until 1910. Then she turned to hauling freight in a wagon for several years.

Mary Gerritse died in 1956, but in a way she is still with us; the saddle she used is on display at the Clatsop County Museum. As you read about her and look at the small saddle, you can almost hear the horses hooves as she gallops along.



BICYCLES ON THE BEACH AT SEASIDE IN 1896. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)



We would like to thank everyone who assisted in the preparation of this edition of the Historical Review.

We are especially indebted to the Clatsop County Historical Society, the Astoria Library, and most of all, radio stations KAST and FM93, who made it possible.



EARL GRAY PILOTED THE SEASIDE AIRBORNE LIFE PATROL IN THE EARLY YEARS. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)

## Clatsop Co. Historical Society

The Clatsop County Historical Society was formed in 1950 to collect, preserve, and exhibit the history of this region.

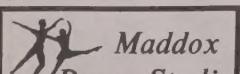
The Clatsop County Historical Society manages the historic Flavel House mansion in Astoria. The structure was built for sea Captain George Flavel in 1885, and is considered one of the best examples of Queen Anne style architecture in the Pacific Northwest.

### Northwest.

A second facility, Astoria's old City Hall, was purchased by Clatsop County Historical Society in the spring of 1985. The society is in the process of restoring the exterior of the neo-classic building. In November of 1985, the Society opened a Heritage Museum in the old City Hall and is continuing to develop exhibits inside as restoration progresses on the exterior.



"BRUNO" WAS EVERYBODY'S FRIEND IN SEASIDE 50 YEARS AGO. (Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)



### APPEARANCE SCHEDULE

April 12 Astoria Crab Fest.  
May 30-31 "Alice in Wonderland" ballet, AHS  
June 18 Summer school opens  
Sept. 4 Fall classes begin  
Dec. 5, 6 The Nutcracker Ballet, AHS  
Classes in ballet, tap, jazz, Adults and children.

325-3961 REGISTER NOW!  
1248 Commercial Astor Bldg.



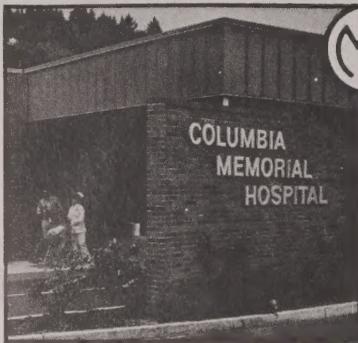
BRIDGE STREET IN TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY SEASIDE.  
(Courtesy Clatsop County Museum)

**The Dutch Cup** • Friendly Family Dining • River View

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68 YEARS



## COLUMBIA MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

In 1919 the Astoria Finnish Brotherhood initiated the hospital project and started looking for funds and support from other groups. By 1921 an organization, the Fraternal Hospital Association, Inc., had been formed to proceed with the project. John A. Wicks, an Astoria architect, was selected and property was purchased at 16th and Franklin. Excavation began in 1922 but the Great Fire that same year made continuance of the hospital impossible.

Four years after the Astoria Fire of 1922 the Columbia Conference of the Augustan Lutheran Church voted to take over the Astoria hospital project and \$150,000 was set aside for the building. A name was chosen for the hospital; "Columbia" from the name of Captain Robert Gray's ship "Columbia". (When St. Mary's Hospital was purchased years later from the Roman Catholic Sisters, the name was lengthened to "Columbia Memorial Hospital".) Mr. John A. Wicks was appointed to continue as architect and Pastor A.V. Anderson was elected to be the first superintendent of Columbia Hospital.

The cornerstone was laid on April 25, 1927 and by August 1, 1927 the first patients entered the hospital. The total cost of "Columbia" Hospital was \$220,000. This hospital was rated, at that time, to be one of the best equipped fire-proof small hospitals in Oregon.

Columbia Memorial Hospital now is an ultra-modern facility with a new location at 2111 Exchange. The hospital is 24-hour physician staffed to provide urgency/emergency care at any time and is equipped with state-of-the-art diagnostic tools such as ultra-sound and CAT scanner equipment.

Many people appreciate the excellent service and feeling of small-town friendliness.

"We are here when you need us."

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